

MY SATURDAY CLASS.

THE EARLIEST BEGINNING OF THE CLASS.

[The following Paper also shows the possibilities of expansion which our pupils find for themselves. It is written by a child who began her class at the age of twelve, and is still, I believe, continuing it.]

It is now more than three years since my Saturday Class was started. Most people living in a country village and having every-day intercourse with the cottagers and their children, are aware of the sad fact that a great deal of unnecessary cruelty is caused by them towards animals.

One sees a poor, miserable bird hanging outside a cottage door, in a tiny cage, often without seed or water, dirty and wretched. In a small back garden you may come across a little white rabbit (perhaps one the father found and brought home) shut up in an old sugar box, scarcely large enough for it to stretch his cramped limbs. Walking down a village street one meets a ragged little boy tormenting some poor little butterfly or beetle, and pulling its legs off, innocently unconscious of the pain he is causing by his thoughtless actions. People who would never hurt a fly themselves are fully aware that scenes such as these are being acted around them every day, yet seem unable to take one step to mend the evil.

It is a pity that in so many schools where children are taught grammar, history, and such like things, that no one dreams of telling them the urgent necessity of treating their dumb fellow-creatures with kindness and consideration. These people who take an interest in the animals around them, who share the world with them, and help to make it beautiful, receive more pleasures from life by far than those who count animals merely as animals, not considering them as living creatures capable of feeling pain and pleasure. Every one who has tried, knows that if an animal be treated with kindness and gentleness it is sure to repay its benefactor by showing love and devotion in return.

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I think many things combined to put into my head the idea of starting a class of natural history. The idea grew upon me as I reflected. The faint, far-distant longing soon grew to a real, larger hope. My mind seemed to have been in a way prepared to receive this idea by seeing the sufferings of the various pets which were often shown to me, and feeling the need of some teaching for the cottage children.

After the plan became definite, and took a decided form, and it was almost agreed that I could be trusted with a few children to show my pets to, and do what I could to induce them to think more of theirs, there yet remained several obstacles to overcome. I knew two children in the village to whom I explained some of my views, and after some discussion on both sides it was at length agreed that they should come up next Saturday. I was wild with excitement and impatience. How slowly that week dragged along! I felt that Saturday would never come. But "all things come round to him who will but wait."

MY FIRST LESSON.

A small room which was never used much had been given up for my benefit, and four coloured plates of birds and animals hung on the wall. A row of chairs had been placed for "The Class," as I proudly named my new institution, and a small table and chair opposite for my use.

A large dish of buns waited behind the scenes to be doled out after the lesson, for food for the body I find is more often appreciated by my class than food for the mind. At the appointed hour five children stumped in looking extremely shy and awkward. I settled them in their places, and provided each with a carefully written out verse on animals, but soon discovered, by various nudgings and giggles and whispers, that the youngest could not read hand-writing at all! After I had printed her verse I sat down to conquer my own shyness. We are all prone to nervousness at some time of our lives. Some people are aware of being out of place in their situation, others of having nothing to say and feel each minute an hour, others are self-conscious, but these sensations are all really different forms of shyness. I believe unselfishness is often the cure, for when thinking of others we forget our own feelings altogether. So I sat, and looked

upon those five children, and gradually I felt more elated. Five children seemed a whole school to me! That first day went off well, all things considered; the first day of anything new is always trying. Towards the end the attention of my pupils lagged; a yawn or two were smuggled, and weary sighs were prevalent. I bethought me of the buns! As they appeared what a change was visible on all faces. Everyone's concentrated attention was fixed on that plate: not a sigh was heard, not a yawn was visible, and thus, with general satisfaction and universal buns, ended my first class. As the five girls, each clasping a bun, departed, I stood on the doorstep and watched them over the green fields, and dreamed of a perfect reformation and the most humane village in Wales, and the ways of the local children all improved by *me*! Alas! for the vanity of all human creatures!

III.—THE PROGRESS OF THE CLASS.

Since that long ago Saturday I have had many classes. During the summer I give my classes outside, but when it is too cold the girls gather in the little room, now dedicated to their use, where we met for the first time. I have continued my classes, sometimes with few sometimes with many pupils. Many of those who came then are now "out in service," which is announced to me with great pride. Some are far away, one is dead; some, indeed, have turned out well, and even now come back to see me on spare Saturdays. I have had girls in my class varying in age from seven to fourteen—some of the poorest and some of the well-to-do cottagers. Some I have had have been bright and intelligent, always ready for new subjects, and very keen; a real pleasure to teach. Others, again, have been slow and very dull; but there is a great delight in seeing a quick smile of comprehension on the usually dull faces, or hearing an intelligent remark from dull lips.

A few, and only a few, I am glad to say, cling to their old ideas. One girl persisted that a mole was an insect, in spite of all my efforts; another believed that snails could sting, while a third told me that butterflies turn into caterpillars. These things are certainly very trying, but I have argued many out of their old ridiculous fancies. Altogether I have had in my class about eighteen girls, but never more

than twelve at once. They bring me all the animals and insects they find, and sometimes present me with a box creter, anyhow," and I discover some funny little grasshopper or beetle. Occasionally I bring out some shells or large moths to be inspected, and the exclamations of wonder are most amusing to hear. When I give them some shells they compare notes. "My! yours be a fine one." "Yes, but Jinny's got such a one, all red and yellow, I never saw the likes of it." "Mine's the best," &c., is whispered all round the room.

The hours of the class are usually from 3-30 to 5 o'clock. I find an hour and a half long enough; at the end of that time everyone is quite ready for the buns behind the scene. Once a large and tempting dish of cakes was placed on my table inside the room, and I thought nothing about it. But very soon the general attention flagged, and the girls scarcely cared whether the common house fly had two legs or six. I began to perceive that I was not first or foremost in their minds, and I did not care to play second fiddle, especially as "buns" was "premier." I was wiser next Saturday. I did not blame the children, but removed the cause of inattention promptly.

IV.—PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING.

I believe if people knew more about toads they would not regard them with such abhorrence. They would gradually begin to take an interest in their ways and habits, and seeing the wonderful cleverness and intelligence of such despised creatures would help much to do away their dread of them. It is the same with many other insects or animals. I thought of this when I started my class, and I have worked continually keeping in my mind that to do away with ignorance is often to do away with dislike.

(Unfinished.)